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SENSITIVE
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IT](#)
SUBJECT: PADUA: DEMOCRATIC PARTY SUPPORT FADING

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. The Democratic Party (PD) in Northern Italy hopes to offset likely losses in the June EU parliamentary elections with some significant wins in the accompanying local elections where the individual popularity of candidates matters more. Key to this strategy would be the reelection of the popular Mayor Flavio Zanonato in populous, economically-strategic Padua. However, with the center-right all but certain to name a strong challenger and Democratic Party popularity still in the gutter, the Mayor's reelection campaign is shaping up to be a tight race. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Padua's popular center-left mayor, Flavio Zanonato, is (along with Turin's Sergio Chiamparino) a rare bright spot for the Democratic Party in otherwise resoundingly center-right Northern Italy. However, Democratic Party support appears to be fading ahead of administrative elections in June. Zanonato, as a dedicated leftist, is an anomaly in Padua, which has traditionally had a center-right political bent. Still, during his five-year tenure, Mayor Zanonato has built his support base largely through decided actions to close down and remove (and relocate within Padua) residents from a ghettoized immigrant neighborhood that had become a haven for drug traffickers. Local journalists and politicians from both sides of the political spectrum note that Zanonato will be going into his campaign for reelection next June from a position of strength.

¶3. (SBU) Even with a strong and very popular candidate in Zanonato the Democratic Party will face a very tight race to keep hold of one of its only mayors in a significant northern city. Zanonato took advantage of a temporarily weak center-right united behind an unpopular mayor to win the last election. The climate is significantly different now, with the Democratic Party generally in disarray after sweeping losses in the April 2008 national elections, and a likely high-profile, popular center-right candidate to oppose Zanonato - Mario Bertolissi, a well-regarded constitutional lawyer and professor hand-picked by Veneto Regional President Giancarlo Galan (the most prominent center-right politician in the region). Similarly, Zanonato's popularity shows little sign of spreading to help the party win other local elections such as the presidency of Padua Province.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: The anticipated closeness of the race for the popular Zanonato's seat before the center-right has even formally announced a candidate is emblematic of the Democratic Party's overall struggle to shore up its base in northern Italy let alone gain new supporters. The local administrative and EU parliamentary elections in June will be the first major electoral test since the center-left's defeat

in all regions of Northern Italy last April. Coupled with an expected further drop in support for the Democratic Party in the EU elections, the loss of one of a very few significant mayorships in Northern Italy would be politically embarrassing and demoralizing for an already moribund party. Like other provincial and regional elections, the PD is forced to rely in Padua on its candidate's personal popularity because of the party's continuing struggles. End comment.

WEYGANDT